

During what was a surprisingly eloquent farewell speech on the House floor last week, Tom DeLay strove to defend the role of both partisanship and principal in our political system.

It is ironic to think, therefore, that his words, when held against the recent history they reflected upon, revealed a man with no appreciation for, or true understanding of, the very ideas he attempted to espouse.

"You show me a nation without partisanship," Mr. DeLay said, "and I'll show you a tyranny." These were valuable words, and ones with which I agree.

Through them, Mr. DeLay was trying to present his highly partisan political career as nothing more than a defense of democracy itself - as the natural outgrowth of fundamental ideas and ideals that he and his conservative colleagues were unwilling to compromise. "The point is we disagreed," he said, speaking to Democrats, "on first principles, we disagree. And so we debate."

If an open and honest meeting of ideas had defined the work of the House in recent years, our nation, and our political system, would be far better for it. But the truth of the matter is that the opposite has proven to be the case.

Mr. DeLay's career was about not consultation, but control. His was a House antithetical to healthy partisan debate, one far more defined by the values of tyranny than of democracy.

A strong democratic government composed of competing parties can only truly function within a clear and established set of rules and procedures. If, for example, the legislative ideas of a minority party are systematically prevented from being debated and voted on - as the Republican Majority has done for years with Democratic bills - then what good is a multi-party system?

In the same way, if the standards of conduct applied to Members of the Congress - standards

designed to prevent them from either abusing their positions of influence and trust, or from becoming the willing tools of the rich and well-connected - if these standards are cast aside and broken with impunity, then what remaining integrity or value can our political system claim to have?

And yet, these were the indefensible practices Mr. DeLay brought to the House during his years in power.

His were years of chronic abuses of power, of likely violations of the law, and of repeated defiance of House rules and ethical guidelines - none of which he admitted to in his final remarks.

What his statement actually revealed was that he still to this day sees no difference between a legitimate fight for the hearts and minds of the American people, and an intentionally deceitful fight conducted with a "win at any cost" mentality.

To everyone except Mr. DeLay, bribery, corruption and abuse of power are not and should not be the tools of partisanship. To sacrifice laws, principles and standards of ethical conduct on the altar of power, and to then justify these actions by dishonestly equating them with tough partisanship - those are the mob values that Mr. Delay brought to this Congress. They are not values worthy of the People's House.

Mr. DeLay's fundamental disregard for our government's time-honored laws and rules has threatened to lead us away from democracy - not to it, as he implicitly contended.

What democracy has taught the world - a lesson we must embrace once again - is that the ends do not always justify the means. And it has taught us that the truth is strong enough to stand on its own. If ideas and practices must be propped up with the crutch of corruption, then they are, in reality, frauds.

It is a shame that Mr. DeLay and his allies seem to be the only people left who still don't understand these simple truths.